

*Chamberlain*

TO  
A STRANGER IN HYDE PARK.

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AND so, my friend, you have come to visit the Great Exhibition! Perhaps you have been long anticipating the pleasure you now enjoy : nor does the sight of the Crystal Palace, its contents, and its crowds, disappoint your expectations. All things considered, you are ready to admit that so marvellous a work of art was never accomplished before as that magnificent, capacious, and graceful edifice which lifts up its stately dome above the tops of yonder trees. No wonder that it seems to you like a magical delusion rather than a substantial reality—a poet's dream rather than a

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sober fact. The unexampled rapidity with which the structure has been completed, and the small cost at which it was reared, increase the surprise which it excites in its innumerable beholders. You have wandered up and down its aisles and galleries, and been nearly bewildered by its treasures of art: at every step some curious specimens of workmanship have arrested your notice and repaid your attention. Your imagination has been excited, your taste gratified: but you have been like persons walking through a richly planted garden, where the flowers examined are few compared with those which remain unnoticed. Numbers of objects, elegant and interesting, amidst such a multitude, fail to receive inspection, however worthily they invite it. And the crowds of visitors—men from all parts of our native land, and from many a foreign country and clime—how richly they enliven the spectacle of art on which they come to gaze! As they have passed and re-passed, their diversified forms, complexions, countenances, and features have presented you with a study as interesting as (perhaps you have found it even more so than) the piles of artistic wealth that are heaped upon either side the path in which you and those strangers have met together with so much good will.

Will it not be an agreeable change—indeed a relief after the exciting survey in which you have been employed—to sit down under this shady elm, that we may converse for a few moments on the all-absorbing object before us, and think over some of the important considerations which to reflective minds it is likely to suggest?

There is a saying by one who was both a sovereign and a sage, and whose extraordinary intellect was purified and exalted by Divine inspiration, that “he that handleth a matter wisely shall find good.” It is a maxim remarkable for both breadth and brightness; shining in its own light, commending itself to every man’s understanding; it also expands into an amplitude of application which almost defies admeasurement. It not only bears upon our actions but upon our thoughts, upon the way in which we examine a subject, and contemplate an event, as well as the way in

which we transact any particular business, or order our daily conduct. While we are prepared to apply it to the enterprise which has produced the Exhibition; while we hope and trust that by continued wisdom in its entire management, especially in connexion with right views and motives on the part of its conductors, it will, under the blessing of Divine Providence, yield advantage; we are certain that if we look attentively and with the best kind of intelligence at what is now before us, and so "handle the matter wisely," we shall find good to ourselves, and reap some lessons of the highest import and of more value to our souls than all the material treasures which have just been dazzling our eyes.

Surely we cannot but remember, as we think upon these various products of ingenious toil, that they are all shaped out of *materials supplied by the Divine Being*. Artistic skill is displayed in these works of men; but the creative power out of which the elements thus wrought and fashioned originally arose, is God's alone. Man may be architect, artist, and artizan; but only the Almighty is creator. The human hand carves and moulds and weaves; but all upon which it thus employs itself was in the first instance called out of nothing by the voice of Him who spake and it was done, who commanded and it stood fast. Whether what you have so much admired comes from loom, anvil, or chisel, the human agent must not be allowed to stand between you and the first Great Cause of all things, so as to hide him from sight. Of him, through him, and to him are all things. He from the beginning enriched the store-house of the earth with all the mineral and vegetable and other treasures which it contains, and he too has given to man understanding and skill to enable him to work them up for useful purposes. Little did Adam think when he looked over the beautiful scenes of the world, that so much lay hid beneath his feet, which his sons and daughters would possess the ability so largely to extract and so wonderfully to employ. It has taken ages thus far to find out what God has furnished for us in the globe. Discovery and invention have been of slow and gradual growth: nor can we believe that all the hidden things which our beneficent

Maker and Lord has laid up for our race in this house of their pilgrimage have been brought out and applied by human industry at present. We gather in much more of our heavenly Father's bounty than our ancestors did; our posterity, it is more than probable, will gather in more than we. One of the first impressions made by what we have seen should be a devout acknowledgment of Him from whom proceeds alike the material and the faculty of human labour. "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all:" "the earth is full of thy riches," Psal. civ. 24.

Nor can we look on these formations of man's gifted industry, and reflect upon the manifold processes through which they have been brought into their present shape, order, and beauty, without being led to recognise *something within the human breast* as transcendent in its importance and worth as it is invisible and mysterious in its nature. Surely no one in his senses could place the contrivers of all this astonishing array of art on a level with the brutes that perish! Looking at the instinct of the birds which have built their nests in the trees around us, or of the bees which are sucking honey out of yonder flowers wherewith to store their cells—very wonderful as it is—we see, on a little reflection, how immeasurably superior is the intellect of man. It were idle to compare the stereotyped forms of *instinctive* art with the ever varying and advancing forms of *intellectual* art. The collection of curiosities you have just examined proclaim most emphatically the high powers and capacities of the human mind. Then is it likely that a being endowed with reason and conscience is to sink into annihilation in a few short years?—that the immaterial agent which works within, and employs eyes and fingers only as instruments for doing its incalculably various tasks, should cease to exist when it leaves its present dwelling, and lays aside its present tools? The immortality of the soul is set forth in the clearest light in the gospel of Jesus Christ. You cannot quietly reflect upon its testimony without finding a corroboration of it in your own bosom. That you are to live when all these material objects which now delight the senses, when the buildings of the great

metropolis, and all the productions of art throughout the world, and all its natural and long-enduring scenes, its mountains, rivers, and seas shall have passed away, is a great indubitable fact—to you the most interesting of all facts, for it comes home to your inmost soul. It were a sad reflection upon you or any one to be so absorbed in these visible things, to be so carried away by what belongs only to time and sense, as to be unmindful of the everlasting welfare of the better portion of your nature. The future!—the world to come!—heaven and hell!—how very solemnly do they open before you as you call to mind the discoveries of the word of God. Could you possess all that is collected together in yonder store-house of the world's merchandize; could you possess all the wealth of which it is the representation, what would it be worth when that future is fully realized, and the soul is actually introduced into those eternal and unchangeable regions? The Great Teacher proposed a problem which no arithmetical skill can solve, but to which our moral nature returns a simple direct answer: “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” It could be no profit. There is nothing he could give.

Reverting once more to what you have seen, have you not considered that the productions of art which so delight your taste and imagination have been effected through *careful obedience to the physical laws* impressed by the Creator on material nature? Without the study of them, without submission to their authority, that palace of glass could not have been reared, nor any of the beautiful objects within it formed. And just glancing round this park, and viewing for a moment the green sward at your feet, and the lines and groups of trees which extend over the prospect, and the calm blue lake, and the bright sky, and the sailing clouds—why are they so fair and beautiful? Because they are all in conformity with the physical laws of God. Conceive of any of these objects endowed with the powers of will, and left to disobey “the ordinances of heaven”—and all their order and perfection would at once cease. What now pleases and soothes the mind would be

a scene of utter confusion. The beauty of every thing depends on its harmony with the law of God. What is true of the physical is true of the moral. There must be obedience. The voluntary obedience of man is as necessary as the involuntary obedience of inferior natures. God gives law to man in the Bible and in conscience, but man tramples them both under feet. He will do what seemeth good in his own eyes; and as broken law can only assert its authority by the infliction of penalties, the consequence is the unhappiness of man. Hence all the confusion, and trouble, and misery in the world; hence the contrast between man and what exists around him—between the awful secrets of the human heart and the beauty and glory of external nature.

How many of the persons you have passed to-day, notwithstanding their gay appearance, lead mournful lives! Perhaps you are ready to acknowledge yourself in this respect too like them. You have no real peace. You strive to be happy, and happiness flees from you. You adopt all kinds of expedients to secure inward comfort, but all fail. Disappointed, you still try. Fresh disappointments, perhaps, do not discourage further trials. Do you despair? Now, where lies the secret of your sorrow? You lay the blame perchance on circumstances, friends, the world, nature, God. Thus you invent causes; the right one is missed. Here it is, my friend, lying with yourself, in your own soul, your own will. *Your life is out of harmony with the law of God.* God's law runs in one direction, and carries happiness along with it. Your obstinate inclinations run in the opposite direction, and dash against that law. The collision creates the wretchedness of which you complain. God requires you to love him with *all* your heart, and mind, and soul, and strength. You have no such love. God tells you that his favour is life. That favour you do not seek. He declares that the friendship of the world is enmity against him. Is not that the very friendship you most cordially cherish? He bids you not lay up treasures on earth. Yet what else have you been doing all your days? He commands you to lay up treasures in heaven. When have you seriously sought to make such investments? This sad defiance of

God's will is the cause of your secret discontent and anguish. The soul is ruined through it; yes, ruined! It has lost its beauty and loveliness. You would have been ready to weep if you had seen one of the exquisite pieces of statuary in the Exhibition dashed in pieces. But what would the demolition of a work of art be compared with the actual ruin of the soul, formed at first in the likeness of God himself? Man, "made in his own image," fallen, destroyed! Now that is a spectacle to touch the feelings of an angel: how should it touch your feelings, your own soul being the sorrowful object in question!

Is there no remedy? Can the soul be no more restored? Is it cut off from happiness for ever? Is the present loss *final*? The New Testament supplies an answer. It alludes to a great gathering which once took place at Jerusalem at the feast of tabernacles: that feast was a joyous one—the people lived for days in tents, booths, and bowers decorated with evergreens, and at night illuminated with lamps; and there were processions in the temple, and water was drawn from the well of Siloam by one of the priests with a golden pitcher. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, standing up on the last day, that great day of the feast, said to the people, "*If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.*" One can fancy the crowds congregated around him at the close of the solemnity! People from all countries, like the assembly at Pentecost; "Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judæa and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews, and proselytes, Cretes, and Arabians." Conceive of them at Jerusalem, in the courts of the temple, and He, the Holy One of Israel, the Shepherd of lost souls, looking over the throng and reading the anxious countenances of the multitudes, and reading, too, their inmost thoughts! Imagine you see him with a look of infinite benignity and authority, and hear him, with an expression of mingled majesty and mercy, repeat this wonderful invitation to the people full of necessities, and thirsty for some supply! Some young Jew may be there who has come up

with his father to the feast, and he is thirsting for pleasure; and there stands another of the same age who thirsts for fame, while yet another thirsts for knowledge, and separates himself to seek and intermeddle with all wisdom. The poor are thirsting for riches, and the rich are thirsting for tranquillity of mind and satisfaction. How yonder grey-headed patriarch, who has buried his wife and children, thirsts for comfort and consolation! How the publican there, smiting on his breast, thirsts for mercy and peace! We cannot particularize all their wants and desires. But whatever be the particular form in which they are conscious of necessity, in Him who thus addresses them they will find all they need. Not in the way in which some of them imagine they require to be supplied will he supply them. Infinitely better than that, he will extract the inward source of their discontent, and fill them with a satisfaction of which they do not even dream. Not a slight sip of the cup of happiness will he give them, but within them will he create a well of water springing up to everlasting life.

What they all really want is *reconciliation with their Maker*, and a *new heart*. Neither their disease nor their remedy do many of them understand; but the Divine Physician does, and he teaches them and us that man must be delivered from condemnation and be born again, John iii. He accomplishes both. He is exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance unto Israel, and the remission of sins, Acts v. 31. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin, 1 John i. 7. Believers are made *new creatures* in Christ Jesus; old things pass away; behold, all things become new, 2 Cor. v. 17. By *coming* to him, by drawing near in the exercise of simple faith, by casting off all dependence on the world or self, by renouncing all hope of ever being saved or made happy except through the blessed mediation of Jesus Christ, by an entire and exclusive reliance upon the blood and righteousness of the Divine Redeemer, by the submission of the whole soul to God through Christ, by repentance for the past and prayer for the renewal and sanctification of the Spirit to make the future the opposite of the past, by yielding the soul into

the hands of Christ, as the Prophet, Priest, and King of the redeemed church; thus, by *coming* to him, and by this means alone, will the burning thirst of the human heart be quenched for ever, and the hidden spring of peace and joy, which true Christians so well know, be opened with its refreshing and everlasting tide of waters.

The crowd at the feast of tabernacles is the counterpart of the crowd at the Great Exhibition. The wants we have mentioned are not the wants of an age, a country, or a class, but the wants of *man*. People you see passing to and fro are thirsting for happiness under some imaginary form. They, perhaps, hew out to themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water. They feed on ashes; a deceived heart has turned aside both them and *you*. Is not the type of your character and state to be found amidst that gathering of old time in Jerusalem? Rely on it, my friend—for all Scripture and observation and experience establish it—that never will you find rest and peace for your souls till you are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, and have obtained that new nature which is the gift of grace.

Now if this be true, is it not a truth which ought to take precedence of every other? Can you let any worldly pleasures or occupations interfere with the impression which it must forthwith make upon your mind if prayerfully pondered? Can you suffer even intellectual pursuits, the search after knowledge in literature and science, to clash with the solemn, imperative, and immediate demands of that great fact now placed before you? Can you so well employ the remaining moments of this season of leisure in which we have ventured to address you, as in following out the hints just given, and studying the vital subject suggested in the light of revelation? This may be a critical epoch in your experience. The Spirit of God is now ready to pour into you the riches of his grace; will you seal up the vessel? He is now willing to kindle a sacred fire in your soul; will you quench the torch? He is now breathing around life-giving gales; will you close the casement of the heart against them? He is now standing at

the door, waiting to make you the temple of his presence; will you refuse him admission? Beware lest he depart; lest the fountain be sealed, the fire never rekindled, and the breezes blow no more; lest the Visitant should retire for ever from the threshold of a heart where it has been so often and so long insulted and despised! He that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy," Prov. xxix. 1.

How infinitely momentous are these subjects! Compared with these themes of everlasting interest, how poor and pitiful are all those secular matters which here excite our curiosity, and employ our thoughts! Placed beside the verities of the gospel and the realities of another world, how vain and shadowy appear all the pomp and glory of the world! Soon, and all the multitudes around will have passed away! One feels in this Hyde Park, while looking on the gay throngs lining its manifold green avenues, like Xerxes, who wept as he looked at his great army, and thought, "A hundred years hence, and all these mortals will be gone." Less than a hundred years most probably will sweep away the entire crowd. Long, long before that, the far greater portion will have been gone. These trees, it may be, will continue to bear and shed their leaves, the heavens above may be as bright as ever, and visitors unborn may then wander over this spot to witness developments of civilization such as might astonish us even in this age of wonders; but those around us now will have gone the way whence they will not return, and be surrounded by very different scenes from this or any other that their eyes can at present look upon. You will be gone. You will then know what is meant by eternity, what is meant by being with Christ, or by going to *your own place*; very soon you may know these secrets. There may be but a step between you and death. Ere this festival shall end, your remains may be sleeping in the churchyard. The sun now shining on you so cheerfully, may, in a few short months, or weeks, or days, be shining on your grave. The possibility of this is an urgent reason for immediate attention to the welfare of the soul. "Take heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. For the Son of

man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore; for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning: lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch," Mark xiii. 33—37. It is not enough for you to watch after *the signal* has been given of your Lord's being at hand; or after sickness, or accident, or old age, tells you death is at the very door. It is a great mistake which people make about religion to suppose that there will be time enough to attend to it when the last warning has been received. Even could such a warning be calculated on (*which it cannot*) the interval after it is not the time prescribed in Scripture for preparation. *Before* the cry was heard, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh," it was necessary for the virgins to have oil in their vessels with their lamps, needing only to be *trimmed* at last. While death is yet uncertain, while the pulse of health beats high, is the proper season to prepare for the coming of the Son of man. The right preparation, in fact, is a life of faith on Him whose coming will then end our sorrows and our sins, and raise us to perfect holiness and unmingled bliss. It is not to be crowded into the few last days or hours, but to be spread over all previous time whether long or short. It is not preparation for an evil, but for a good, the highest of all good, and it partakes of the blessedness it prepares for. A life of true Christian piety is a life of heaven on earth, "the life of God in the soul of man."

Here we must part. It is with a sincere desire that the plain hints just dropped may be viewed, not in reference to their form, but their intrinsic importance.

They are drawn from the only infallible source of religious knowledge, and indicate briefly the way to salvation and happiness. Well will it be for the stranger in Hyde Park who listens to these few words of Christian truth and love, if he will retire to read his Bible and bend his knees before the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and

fervently ask for those infinitely precious blessings which are freely promised to all who believe. The visit to the Exhibition then will have been productive of unspeakable good, and will have led you into the path which leads to the temple of heaven, whose light is "like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as *crystal*," to the city of which the streets are "pure gold, as it were transparent glass." "And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life," Rev. xxi. 11, 21, 27.

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